



# INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

NSW Chapter

Bulletin 118 March 2025

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Dear Members,

I hope that 2025 is treating you well so far. Your committee has an interesting program organised for the first half of the year and we are working on the second half. The first event will be Dr Deborah Campbell's presentation via Zoom on 20 March (see p.2) which will be followed by the Annual General Meeting on 1 May (via Zoom) and then an Open Forum presentation by Kate Laing (via Zoom) on 21 May (see p.3). In June Christine Yeats FRAHS will speak on her research about a renowned Sydney teacher of dance (see pp 3-4).

The Biography Reading Group has a new Convenor in Alice Paul who will be in touch with members soon. Meetings by zoom will be at 2pm on Thursdays, duration up to 90 minutes. Dates this year in April, June, August and October. *Joan Lindsay, The Hidden Life of the Woman who wrote Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Brenda Niall is the book that will be discussed in April.

The Public Affairs Reading Group has decided to reduce the number of its meetings per year until it is able to attract more members. Its first meeting will take place via zoom on Wednesday 26 March when Eric Beecher *The Men Who Killed the News* will be discussed.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, or interesting snippets of research, please send them to me by **16 April 2025** at: [cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au).

**Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor**

## NSW Chapter ISAA

### Executive members

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Vice-Chair: Christine Yeats  
FRAHS

Secretary: Susan Flaxman

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Dr Susan Steggall

Michelle Cavanagh

### Library Liaison:

Christine Yeats

### Public Events Committee:

Lesley Potter, Christine Jennett,

David Carment AM,

Shirley Randell AO,

Christine Yeats

### Dates for Your Diary

20 Mar: *Doing Research*

26 Mar: Public Affairs Reading  
Group

1 May: Annual General Meeting

21 May: Open Forum

26 Jun: Work-in-Progress

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## *Doing Research Meeting*

Thursday 20 March

4 pm via Zoom

Speaker: Dr Deborah Campbell

*Topic: The rise and fall of domestic science education for girls in NSW: 1913 to 1960: lessons learned*

### Abstract

What began as an exercise to ‘give back’ to the community, to use my skills as a trained historian and professional writer in 2024 to offer to write a history of my girls’ high school, ended up taking a different direction. Unfortunately, because the imminent merger of Randwick Girls’ High School with its boys’ counterpart was highly contentious (especially on the girls’ side), a history – to those steering the merger – was undesirable to say the least.

I decided instead to examine the phenomenon of domestic or home science schools which prevailed from the 1920s in NSW until abolished by the Wyndham Scheme forty years later. Domestic or home science schools that offered two to three years of secondary schooling were designed to turn out girls trained for domestic service and for their ‘natural destiny’ – as wives and mothers. Subjects included the usual cooking and sewing and some commercial electives (typing). Such schools provided three years of post-primary schooling with no opportunity for further education or matriculation.

What I have found is that while the ‘domestic ideology’ was publicly strong, girls given the choice of commercial subjects chose them overwhelmingly. An outraged commentator in the NSW Teachers’ Federation journal asked in 1937:

Why describe as domestic science schools those educational establishments which apparently cater for commercial subjects? <sup>1</sup>

Noeline Kyle in her otherwise excellent *Her Natural Destiny. The Education of Women in New South Wales*, focuses on the ideology but does not drill down into the numbers of students taking the commercial options. Girls were circumventing the domestic typecasting and ‘voting with their feet’. They wanted jobs in retail industries, business and commerce. Domestic science schools lingered into the 1950s but their ultimate demise was of course aided by changes in employment, the increasing wealth and sophistication of the NSW (and Australian) economy following the Second World War and the realisation, at both the Commonwealth and State level, that the nation’s secondary education was underfunded and no longer fit for purpose. The reforms devised and implemented by Harold Wyndham, who ‘deplored the wastage of female talent’ in Australia, finally levelled the playing field for students but especially for girls. Many were quick to seize the opportunities presented and many were able to complete their secondary education and pursue rewarding and lengthy careers.

### About the Speaker:

Dr Deborah Campbell, who has a doctorate in history from the University of New South Wales, spent over four years on the staff of the Deputy Premier of New South Wales as a policy adviser in the areas of Health and Transport in the 1980s.

Following a varied and successful career of over twenty-three years working for the NSW Government as a policy adviser, manager and senior executive, Deborah became a partner in the establishment of Campbell Macpherson Pty Ltd as a boutique consultancy which provided services to support the legislative and policy process, including major legislative projects, statute law revision, regulatory impact statements, ministerial reports, cabinet submissions and briefing papers as well as undertaking management reviews and developing policy discussion papers. After eighteen years she wound up the company and retired in 2023.



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<sup>1</sup> ‘Querist’, ‘Domestic Science Schools. Their Name and Function, *Education*, Vol.18, No. 6 April 1937  
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/233746663?keyword=Domestic%20science%20schools>

## Open Forum

Wednesday 21 May

4 pm via Zoom

Speaker: Kate Laing

Topic: *Sisters in Peace*



Dr Kate Laing received her PhD in 2017 from La Trobe University focussing on the history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia. Laing received the Nancy Millis Award from La Trobe for her thesis in 2018, a Norman McCann Summer Scholarship from the NLA in 2014, and has published in peer reviewed journals.

*Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915–2015* (ANU Press) examines the rise of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), providing a gendered history of this country's engagement with the politics of internationalism.



## WORK-IN-PROGRESS

11.00am - 12.30 pm 26 June

Flinders Room

State Library of NSW

Speaker: Christine Yeats FRAHS

Title: *In search of Esther Vincent 'Hope' Ryrie: Renowned Teacher of Dance*

**Abstract:** Christine Yeats will discuss her biographical research study into the life and legacy of Esther Vincent 'Hope' Ryrie (1910-2003), a renowned teacher of dance whose influence spanned decades. Hope Ryrie's School of Dancing at 170 King Street in Sydney, which she opened in 1939, was still being referred to well into the 1960s. In tracing Hope's journey, Christine will aim to highlight how Ryrie's passion and expertise influenced generations of dancers and dancing educators.

**About the Speaker:** Christine Yeats FRAHS is an archivist and historical researcher. She is the Chair of the Jessie Street National Women's Library and a past President of both the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Federation of Australian Historical Societies. Christine chairs the Assessment Sub-Committee of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee and she is also the current President of the Randwick & District Historical Society. She has a wide-ranging interest in the study of Australia's colonial history. These include the pioneer botanist Sarah Hynes, the history of Romani people in NSW during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the attempts to introduce a silk industry in NSW. Christine has contributed to a great many publications; spoken at national and international conferences and presented talks and workshops for local and family history groups across NSW. Her recent publications include:

'Henry, William Ernest (Bill) (1920–1998)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, *National Centre of Biography*, Australian

National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/henry-william-ernest-bill-32799/text40801>, published online 2023.

'Romani – Towards an Understanding of their Place in Australian History', *ISAA Review* *ISAA Review* (The journal of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc.), Vol 19, Number 1, 2023.

*Handy Guide: Convict Records of New South Wales: The Human Stories of the Transportation System*, St Agnes (SA), Unlock the Past, 2021.

Essays — 'Elizabeth, Lady Gipps', 'Louisa, Lady Duff', 'Lady Edeline Strickland' and 'Margaret, Lady Davison' in Joy Hughes, Carol Liston, Christine Wright (editors), *Playing Their Part, Vice-Regal Consorts of New South Wales 1788–2019*, Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney, 2020.



## BOOK NOTES

John Sanders, 'Pity the poor independent scholar!': *The Lament of a Latecomer Historian*. *Transactions of the RHS* (2024), 2, 433–440. doi:10.1017/S0080440124000070

Hilary Yerbury and ISAA member Peter McDonald brought this valuable article to members' attention. Peter states:

The lack of access as university libraries shift to digital holdings (available to current staff and students only) is bad in the UK and even worse in Australia because we lack an equivalent to the London Library.

John Sanders' commentary addresses the challenges independent scholars face in the United Kingdom in accessing resources and getting their work published in peer-reviewed journals. Sanders highlights the significant contributions of non-affiliated historians who have enriched historical discourse despite not being part of the academic mainstream.

Australian independent scholars outside the academy make significant contributions to research in various historical areas, including family history, community history, local history, business history and labour history. The article underscores the barriers faced by independent scholars, particularly in accessing online resources. While public libraries and archives are generally accessible, university-held e-resources remain largely out of reach due to licensing restrictions. Many Australian universities restrict access to library databases to staff and students - even alumni only limited access to resources.

Sanders also discusses the difficulties independent scholars encounter in the publication process. Finding a suitable journal, understanding its specific requirements, and navigating the submission protocols can be daunting. Despite these challenges, Sanders praises the support and professionalism of journal editors and the peer-review system. State-based historical societies like the Royal Australian Historical Society produce scholarly journals and magazines, while popular journals produce quality articles. Yet international peer-reviewed history journals with important Australian content produced by authors outside the university sector are locked up behind significant paywalls.

The commentary calls for a reappraisal of current policies and licensing agreements to make academic resources more accessible to independent researchers. Sanders advocates for a balance between public good and private gain, suggesting that the right to access historical records and secondary sources should be reasserted. He also recommends simplifying submission protocols to encourage contributions from a more diverse range of authors.

In conclusion, Sanders emphasises the importance of recognising and facilitating the work of non-affiliated scholars whose contributions can enrich historical research and engage a broader audience. This, he argues, would foster a more inclusive and dynamic scholarly community. The author of this article used AI to assist in its production. **Ian Willis**



## *Travelling to Tomorrow: The Modern Women Who Sparked Australia's Romance America*

by Dr Yves Rees

NewSouth Publishing, 2024

Dr Yves Rees' latest book *Travelling to Tomorrow* began as a PhD thesis. It has been turned into an engaging biographical study of ten very different Australian women (out of 700 identified by Rees) who forged new lives in the United States of America in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The group of ten selected by Rees comprises: Mary Lahey (lawyer and judge); Rose Cumming (decorator and socialite); Isabel Letham (swimmer and surfing pioneer); Dorothy Cottrell (writer); Mary Cecil Allen (artist); Vera Bradford (pianist); Persia Campbell (economist, academic and consumer activist); Alice Caporn (health guru); Dorothy Waugh (dentist) and Cynthia Reed (nurse and novelist).

For these women America was a land of adventure and anonymity where they could reinvent themselves. With its promise of modernity and freedom America was far removed from Australia, where women had the vote, but the underlying culture of misogyny, subjugation and discrimination still persisted. Rees acknowledges that this paradisiacal vision of an America where women could reach their full potential contained 'a strong dose of fantasy'. Nevertheless, and although America was no feminist utopia a hundred years ago, these white, largely middle-class women from Australia did progress in their chosen professions.

Each woman's experiences are discussed and woven together in a loosely chronological account narrated at a leisurely pace through the thirty-four chapters of the book. Throughout, Rees includes personal reflections on their research journey, contemporary America and how their 'trans journey' relates to their identification with these women. Nina Culley in her review of the book in *Arts Hub* writes that 'each woman, in her own way, brought back ideas and influences that would reshape Australia's cultural, scientific and artistic landscape'. However, in most cases their names and their lives have been largely forgotten.

*Travelling to Tomorrow* is a readable and entertaining study of ten women who deserve to be better known and honoured in our history. Rees is to be congratulated for bringing them to our attention. **Christine Yeats**



### ART NOTE

#### *Optimism – Reimagining Waste,*

Elissa Gjertson

Exhibition, Harvey Gallery, Seaforth, October 2024

Driving along Sydney Road towards the Spit Bridge, my eye was caught by a large composition of colourful circular objects in the windows of the Harvey Gallery. Squashy sun hats? Giant doilies? The work reminded me of Sonia Delaunay's colourful geometric circles, yet it was clearly not a painting. Intrigued I made a detour to investigate.

Inside the gallery was an exhibition of artworks, some free form, some adopting the conventions of painting (framed or mounted on a durable surface). Working with recycled polypropylene cord, textiles, wire, plastic, cotton, wood, steel and natural fibres wrapped around plastic waste, Elissa Gjertson has reimagined these pedestrian materials into thought-provoking artworks. She bridges the space between contemporary art movements such as abstract expressionism and colour-field painting and Indonesian folk-art techniques and traditions.



*Gili Layar*, Elissa Gjertson (Recycled plastic, waste textile, steel  
180 x 105 x 15 cm); photograph by Susan Steggall

Gjertson is the founder of Plastik Kembali, a Lombok-based studio in Indonesia that creates artworks from recycled materials. Since 2019, PK's mission has been to transform one of Indonesia's biggest environmental challenges – ugly plastic waste despoiling both land and sea – into objects of beauty and contemplation. As the artist says, 'With a planet struggling under the weight of a waste crisis, it can be daunting, and even depressing, to try to find solutions amongst the ongoing challenges. Through art and creativity, however, we can find a new way forward.' The work illustrated here, *Gili Layar*, calls attention to global coral reefs, 60% of which have now been bleached due to climate change.

Using recycled materials is not new of course. In earlier centuries artists painted over canvases and frescoes, melted down bronzes. Around 1912, Picasso invented the process of 'collage', whereby he pasted together scraps of paper, photos and newsprints to form new images. Marcel Duchamp famously repurposed an unremarkable porcelain urinal which, when displayed in a gallery, became high art (*Fountain*, 1917). Found art and junk art – think Pop Art and Nouveau Realism – trace their origins to the Dada movement which proclaimed that art could be made out of anything. In her work, Elissa Gjertson has appropriated, extended, transformed and combined – in short reacted to – ideas expressed in almost all the major movements in fine art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is often assumed that using recycled materials is due to difficulties in obtaining new materials, implying a second choice. Another common assumption is that recycled design is synonymous with ecological design. Certainly, the use of recycled materials invites discussion of environmental responsibility and yet the relationship between 'green' issues and recycled materials in contemporary art/craft is not a simple one. Gjertson breathes new life into what was lifeless and creates permanence in something that was designed as temporary.

According to Anna Champeney, 'the true spirit of freedom in working with recycled materials lies in the relationship between maker and materials, combined with the ability to respond to the particular spirit of the age in order to create designs which are truly objects of our time'. **Susan Steggall**

#### SOURCES

- Anna Champeney, 'Objects of our time. British design and recycling in the 1990s', in *Reclaimed. Recycling in Contemporary British Craft and Design*, The British Council 1990.
- <https://study.com/ArbVisualArts/ArtisticGenres>
- <https://harveygalleries.com.au/artist/elissa-gjertson>

## EXHIBITION NOTE

### *Macchu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru*

Australian Museum, Sydney

The title of this exhibition alone filled me with anticipation. I've been fascinated by the cultures of pre-Columbian South America since I was in high school and in my early twenties, I'd been to Macchu Picchu and walked on the Inca's Royal Road. Much of what I knew back then came from accounts from the Spanish invaders, and the museums mostly presented the finds of archaeologists, rather than the stories of indigenous peoples. The reviews of this exhibition promised amazing story telling and more gold than had been allowed to leave Peru before. While the gold will be a drawcard for many, it was the storytelling that fascinated me.

As a child of the 1960s, and an avid reader about Inca and other civilisations, I knew, or thought I knew, about the importance of the idea of transformation. My simplistic understanding was that shamans consumed hallucinogenic plants and, as a result, became some other, mythical, creature. The idea of transformation runs through this exhibition. Barely into the first room of the exhibition, I understood how my understanding was based on my view of the world, influenced by those Greek and Roman myths, rather than on the view of those shamans and the peoples of the time.

So, let me come to my favourite object in this exhibition, something that absolutely embodies the notion of transformation. It is a stirrup-spout bottle, like many of the artefacts in the exhibition, from the Moche culture of northern Peru, in the time 100-800 CE, entitled *Ai Apaec flying over the mountains*. It represents an episode in the story of the heroic character, Ai Apaec, a name invented in contemporary times, as there are no written records, only artistic representations. Ai Apaec's mission is to rescue the sun, which disappeared into the sea.

This black glazed object shows us Ai Apaec on the back of a vulture as he flies into the overworld. We can see the stylised mountain, and we know that he is not alone as we can identify his companions from the world of humans, a dog and a lizard. Ai Apaec has the fangs and crown of a cat, and his ear ornaments represent snakes. From this, we know that he has taken on characteristics of these creatures. The lizard seems to have some human characteristics as it wears a tunic and carries something like spears. The dog seems to be a dog.

Through drawings on bowls and through representations in stirrup-spout bottles, we learn of his journeys from the world of humans, into the overworld and then into the underworld, the sacrifices he makes and the powers he gains as he finally rescues the sun. As I've been writing, I received the announcement that the closing date of the exhibition has been extended till mid-May, so you may be able to go to the exhibition yourself to find out more about his adventures. **Hilary Yerbury**



## REPORTS

### **Meeting of the Mitchell Library Consultative Committee held on 19 February 2025**

The Mitchell Librarian, Richard Neville, reported on the following:

#### **Strategic plan for 2025-2030**

Main points: There is no significant change in the library's direction although there will be a focus on qualitative rather than quantitative measures. There will be more proactive approach as to what is documented. The library will be seeking more selective partnerships, increased visibility, there will more focus on engagement and more scholarships. There will continue to be a place for smaller organisations and scholarly groups. Link: [https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/strategic\\_plan.pdf](https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/strategic_plan.pdf)

#### **200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Library**

Planning is underway for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2026. Richard Neville is writing a paper on the library's evolution as it moved from a technical to a social history resource.

#### **Fellowship program**

There was a brief update about the latest group of Library Fellows, including the Visiting Fellows. For more information on the recipients:

- 2025 Library Fellows: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/news/2025-fellows-announced>
- 2025 Library Visiting Fellows: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/fellowships/visiting-fellows>

#### **Proposed refurbishment of Governor Maries Bashir reading rooms, and ground floor Macquarie Street building**

There is no definite date/timing for the start of the proposed refurbishment of Governor Marie Bashir reading rooms, and ground floor Macquarie Street building. Unless it can be ready in time for the 2026 anniversary celebrations the work will be carried out until after that. The café and bookshop areas will be extended into the Metcalfe Auditorium area.

#### **New sign-in procedures to catalogue and CRM implementation**

Library Card holders now need to sign in using their email address and a password as part of the Library's CRM (Customer Relations Management System).

#### **Divisional structures**

There is a new Engagement section headed by Rani Haywood (Director Experience and Engagement (<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about/library-executive/rani-haywood>))

#### **New Library Council President, and new Library Council members**

Bob Debus is the new Library Council President. For information on the new President and Council: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about-library/library-council>

#### **New acquisitions**

The new acquisitions include the: Sulman Family Papers; Anita Heiss - Literary papers 2004-23; Ron Austin papers and photographs (Mardi Gras); Kurt Winkler papers ('Dunera Boy'); Peter Kingston papers; Photographs of

Charmian Clift and George Johnston; early copies of *Lord of the Rings* (example of contemporary literary fiction) and Surf Club poster.

### **Digitisation highlights**

Digitisation of the following items in the library's collection have been digitized: Sub-Division Plans; Parish Maps; Town Plans and Town maps

### **New service being trialled**

The library is beta testing a 'Virtual Reading Room' where researchers can access material online in real time, with the assistance of a librarian.

### **Christine Yeats**

ISAA NSW Vice Chair

### **Verbalising Can Clarify**

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful, and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

[cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au)

**Book Notes   Exhibition Notes   Film Notes**

**Research Snippets**

If you have read a book, seen an exhibition or a film of substance lately or



